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NIHILISM AND ANARCHY.

BY CHARLES JOHNSTON, BENGAL CIVIL SERVICE (RETIRED).

"The intellectual and physical strength of the nations and their labor and capital are in large measure diverted from their natural purpose and unproductively consumed.

"National culture, economic progress and the production of wealth are either paralyzed or checked in their development.

"Economic crises are transforming the armed peace of our days into a crushing burden, which the people find it ever harder to bear."

The Tzar's Peace Manifesto.

TWENTY years of comparative quiet following the vast conspiracy of Nihilism had almost led us to believe that the fires of social revolution were burnt out. We have recently had stern reminders that volcanic elements still seethe everywhere beneath the solid-seeming surface of Christendom. Two European countries have been swept from end to end by anarchist riots; an Empress has been stabbed; an Emperor has narrowly escaped assassination; and now we have to add to the list the tragical death of King Humbert.

If we take the murder of President Carnot as forming part of the same cycle of events, as it admittedly does, and add France to Spain, Italy, Austria and Germany, we shall have a total population of over two hundred millions affected, including Celtiberian, Gallic, Latin, Slavonic and Teutonic nations. Nor does this exhaust the area of unrest. We must add that England has been for months, and still is, in the throes of an economic war, where both sides have already lost scores of millions in the contest; while Russia, the remaining great Power of Europe, has for two years been devastated by famines which have desolated twenty provinces. This for Christendom alone.

It would be futile to deny that this is a condition of the utmost gravity; a condition evidently more formidable even than the darkest days of the Nihilist Terror; and, we are unfortunately

compelled to add, a condition in no wise relieved or exhausted by the present outbreaks, or less likely to produce eruptive elements in the future.

The comparison between European anarchy to-day and Russian Nihilism twenty years ago suggests two questions: Whether identical causes lie behind both outbreaks; and, even more interesting, Whether we are again face to face with a conspiracy, widespread, determined, far-sighted, and thoroughly organized, like that of the Terrorists of Russia.

The Nihilists had an army of active members; they had hosts of aiders and abettors even in the imperial household and the great Government departments; they had abundant funds; they had ramifications all through Russia, Siberia and Poland; they had groups in the Balkans and Constantinople; they had centres in Geneva and Paris; and at least a literary outpost in London. They were led by men and women of consummate intellectual force, high daring and entire devotion; like Vera Zassulich, who struck the first blow of militant Nihilism; Krapchevski, who stabbed a famous general of the Third Division, in broad daylight, in a metropolitan thoroughfare, and escaped; Dmitri Lisogub, who lived in poverty, giving all the large revenues of his estate to provide explosives, disguises, and the sinews of underground warfare against autocracy; Goldenberg, who attempted the Tzar's life, in the Crimea, and swallowed poison to escape arrest; Jeliaboff, who prepared the bombs which slew Alexander II., beside the Ekaterinski Canal; and Sophia Perovskaya, whose handkerchief gave the signal for his assassination.

Are there personalities like these in the background to-day, of whom the slayer of President Carnot, the stabber of the Empress Elizabeth, the would-be assassins of the Emperor William, and the murderer of King Humbert are but the tools? Are we in presence of a revival of the International, as conceived by Bakunin, Lasalle and Lavroff, as dreamed of by Hertzen and Krapotkin, and as played with by William Black, in "Sunrise," and by Henry James, in "Princess Casamassima,"—a close-knit union of the People of all lands against the Privileged, ardent with humane ambitions, and ready to lay down life for their ideals; a band of martyrs, taking as their motto: "Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne"?

We can give provisional answers to both these questions, and

they add to the gravity of the outlook. For while the Nihilist movement arose out of local and temporary causes,—a period of transition, affecting one country only,—the present outbreaks, and the very formidable forces behind them, are the fruit of conditions deemed normal and habitual, in no sense transitory, but certain rather to become steadily aggravated, under the operation of existent causes.

Nihilism grew out of the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, and the sudden spread of education which followed it. Russian society was disorganized; and then the floating elements were supplied with intellectual stimulants, and familiarized with the theories of the fashionable materialism of the day; and, at the same time, they were made to feel that there was no room for them in the State. They were taught the chemistry of the high explosives, and then sent forth from the schools to starve.

But the very bitterness of the conditions which engendered Nihilism was a guarantee of their non-continuance. The floods let loose, soon found their level; and the wisdom, beneficence and toleration which made the reign of Alexander III. one of the best in history have restored the social equilibrium of Russia, at least so far as the causes of Nihilism are concerned.

But none of this applies to the countries of Western Europe, where the red banner of anarchy is now raised. We must look elsewhere for the causes of the recent outbreaks. Let us begin with Spain, as most grievously afflicted, and as likely, for other reasons, to be uppermost in our thoughts.

The conditions of that once splendid land are pitiable. The symptoms to be accounted for are these: During three days in May, 1898, there was civil war in eleven provinces of the Peninsula; the people, desperate, leaderless, ineffectual, driven to insurrection by sheer starvation, gathering in the streets, to be shot down by the soldiers; accomplishing nothing by their protests but their own miserable end; and this, not in one region, but in all, from Asturias in the extreme north, to Cadiz in the south; from Leon and Sevilla in the west, through the inland provinces of Toledo, Jaen and Albacete, to Murcia, Alicante, Valencia and Barcelona,—that is, the whole Mediterranean coast.

Behind an outbreak like this, in a fertile country, whose inhabitants are industrious and thrifty, there must be very potent and deep-seated causes of mischief and disorganization; and the

more we examine the matter, the graver does it become, and the more sincere is our sympathy for the people of a grievously afflicted land. We find that, in spite of all their energy and courage, the Spanish peasants have for years been fighting a hopeless battle; that the drift of circumstances against their utmost efforts has been overwhelming; that the "riots" of May were but the last bitter outcry of desperation. The whole condition of the land is one of the utmost decadence; its evident misery the fruit not of one cause, but of many.

Spain has long been losing hopelessly in the battle of the modern world. And a moral rottenness lay at the root of this national disaster. Spain was afflicted with a curse of spiritual terrorism, that held the whole land in slavery; all the energies of progress were crushed, and the brightest intellects were stifled in dungeons or offered at the stake, as an "act of faith," by the Holy Inquisition. The hearts of men were crushed under that iron heel. So it came that, while other lands were striving forwards to wealth and national well-being, Spain, robbed of her moral energies, without guidance or enlightenment, without knowledge of the powers and processes of modern wealth, was left hopelessly behind in the race of nations, utterly unf. to contend with other lands where the rich reproductive powers of thought had been stimulated, not stifled. To the charge of the Holy Office must be laid the decadence of Spain; the utter exhaustion of her energies; the pitiful deaths of the rioters of May; and the strong seeds of anarchy left to grow rank in the hearts of their survivors.

And to this moral injury we must add a material one, at the hands of the same ecclesiastical powers. When the monasteries were suppressed, two generations ago, a startling fact was disclosed. It was found that the revenues of the church in Spain were almost three times the entire revenues of the state, and that one-fifth of the whole population was engaged in the service of the church. And this drain on the resources of the land had lasted for centuries; this enormous tax had been paid, generation after generation, by the peasantry and artisans of Spain; and they had received no material return whatever. It was a sheer economic loss lasting through centuries. No wonder, then, that they have found it impossible to build up any solid prosperity; no wonder that, after generations of heroic struggle, of incessant toil, they find themselves starving to-day, throughout the length and

breadth of the Peninsula, with but the one escape of insurrection, hopeless and fruitless—of deaths by the bullets of their own sons in the Spanish army.

These two causes are adequate in themselves to account for any amount of misery; but we must add two others, of hardly less galling weight. As they more or less affect the whole of Europe, we may speak of them in more general terms.

The exactions of the church in Spain affirmed and sanctioned the principle that the actual cultivators of the soil, who alone drew forth the riches of the earth, must give up a large part of the fruit of their labor, not in exchange for commodities, but without any return whatever,—unless we count as such the spiritual benefits of the Inquisition. To give up the greater part of their wealth, all beyond a mere starvation wage, century after century, and to receive nothing at all in exchange,—this was the fate of the entire peasantry of Spain, of the entire peasantry of Europe, throughout the Middle Ages. It is the condition of the largest part of Europe to-day.

What the church thus practised and sanctioned, the territorial nobility readily imitated. So that we have for centuries had two populations in Europe: first, the actual cultivators of the soil, and then, above these, a second population, producing nothing, but claiming the best fruits of the earth from its cultivators, and carrying out this exaction at the point of the sword; and, further, offering no return whatever to the producers.

We have become so used to this that it seems natural and normal. In reality, it is an enormous injustice. Or, to speak in the passionless language of science, it is an economic disability, against which no country can bear up in competition with freer lands. It is this tremendous disability which has left Europe at the mercy of America; and, while Count Goluchowski has seen the danger, and warned the Cabinets of Europe of its existence, he has either ignored, or he has been blind to, the real cause. The cultivators of Europe cannot compete, because they are compelled to give up a great part of the fruits of their toil, and must therefore put such high prices on the rest to pay expenses that they leave the market practically in the hands of America. Failing to sell, they must give up, starve, protest, and fall, like the bread-rioters in Spain and Italy. For a bread-rioter is simply a man dying of starvation.

To the operation of this cause, we must assign the ruin of agriculture in England. Compelled to pay rents—that is, private taxes—of ten, twenty, or, as in the hop-gardens of Kent, fifty dollars an acre, the farmers have been literally beggared, with the result that they are throwing up their farms, and whole counties are lying fallow. And the heart-breaking struggle they go through, before deciding that they have failed, is as pitiful in England, the richest country in Europe, as it is in Italy or Spain, two of the poorest; while the causes in all three are identical.

And it is characteristic of suffering humanity that this vast injustice, in itself, was never sufficient to call forth a protest. No protest was heard until injustice brought starvation,—the one thing that always makes man vocal and articulate. The cause of the protest was not injustice, but destitution resulting from the competition of a rent-free land.

In Spain, the territorial nobility, with claims to be thus supported by the peasants, amounts to something over a million, out of a population of sixteen millions. And we need hardly point out that the nobles have insisted all along on being supported on a very different scale from that which the peasants were able to afford for themselves. A mere equality between laborer and idler was not to be thought of. The contrast between castle and hut tells its own tale.

We are not called to pronounce upon the morality of this principle, on which a whole epoch rested. Our duty is to show that it is one of the causes of anarchy, or starvation vocalized; because, as an economic disability, it does in actual operation condemn the whole agricultural population of rent-paying countries to failure in the competition of the world's markets; and this failure means starvation, with pitiable protests against starvation, such as have called for the military in Spain and Italy to silence protest in death.

And, as if the burden of suffering humanity were not yet great enough, there is another cause of anarchy in Spain, and indeed in all Europe, as grievous as those which have gone before. It is excessive taxation, and especially that part of taxation which goes to pay the interest of national debts. In Spain, this debt amounts to seventy dollars a head for the whole population. But only the producers in reality pay; and we may estimate the number of male adults amongst the producers at about two million. This

raises the debt, for each male adult producer, to between five and six hundred dollars, the interest of which must be paid year by year. And under the principle of usury, this debt, though paid off in full four times every century, is yet owed in full, and is handed down from father to son as a perpetual legacy.

But this principle of excessive taxation bears even more heavily on Italy; so that we may continue to consider it, in relation to that almost bankrupt land. We are justified in saying that the whole political structure of Europe was built up by the sword; through the conquests of older nations by the Normans, the Goths, the Vandals, the Lombards and their congeners. They spread over the original population, as that second layer of which we have spoken, extorting the better part of the fruit of the soil by armed force. Thus relieved from material cares and toil, the territorial nobles had leisure to quarrel amongst themselves; and the history of Europe is the tale of their quarrels. The peasants paid thrice over, with their goods, with their lives, with their degradation. From amongst these struggling masses, a few great families rose, asserting the right to levy on the produce of one or another piece of territory; these successful families formed the dynasties of to-day, and the tracts over which their levies extended are the modern European lands. The standing armies of Europe are the direct outcome of the rivalry of the great successful families; one army for the Bourbons in France; another for the Hapsburgs in Austria; another for the Spanish branch of the Bourbons; another for the Hohenzollerns; and so on.

Thus it befell that, when United Italy was handed over to the illustrious representative of the House of Savoy, Italy, too, must have a standing army, not to be behind the rest of the "first families" of Europe. The principle that countries are made for their dynasties was once more affirmed. And Italy was forced to live up to a style beyond its means, with the result that the land is practically bankrupt; the peasants are heartbroken; and the outbursts of anarchy from the Alps to Naples and the south bear pathetic testimony to evils too heavy to be borne. What the maintenance of their retinues by the first families of Europe means to the rest of the population has recently been set forth on unimpeachable testimony, which I cannot do better than repeat:

"The intellectual and physical strength of the nations and their labor and capital are in large measure diverted from their natural pur-

pose, and unproductively consumed. National culture, economic progress and the production of wealth are either paralyzed or checked in their development. Economic crises are transforming the armed peace of our days into a crushing burden, which the people find it ever harder to bear."

These are the words, not of some obscure fanatic, but of the most powerful ruler in Christendom.

And all this, we cannot insist on it too often, is wholly the legacy of the armed pillage of the Middle Ages, and the struggles between the great successful families for the right to levy on the produce of different areas; not dreaming, of course, of making any return.

The question of taxation brings up another evil besides that of enormous, unproductive expenditure: namely, the tendency of the governing classes to multiply offices, for the sole purpose of drawing salaries. And this evil bears very heavily upon Italy and Spain. The process of expropriating the peasant is made as costly as possible—for the peasant. It is the coat following the cloak; though the despoiler seems to bear up well against remorse.

In view of these multiplied causes, we can only wonder that the outbursts of anarchy in Italy and Spain have been so limited, so brief, so futile. And their futility leads us to believe that there is no really strong leading behind them. In this, anarchy differs from Nihilism; for the strong personalities of the leaders were the marked feature of the Nihilist movement, and the chief means by which it held the interest of the world. The peasants who died in eleven provinces of Spain, and in a score of Italian cities, fell as sacrifices, not as soldiers in a warfare where there was any hope of victory. It is not conceivable that, under existing circumstances, they could face the army even of Italy or Spain.

What must happen, then? For the causes at work are, as we saw, normal and habitual. And we must suppose that suppression by armed force will also continue. Therefore, one of two things must happen: either the peasantry will continue to be pushed to, and across, the verge of starvation, protesting, and being shot down, until there is an end of them, and national bankruptcy causes the extinction of both army and peasantry; or the soldiers, peasants themselves, will throw down their arms, and we shall have a vast social upheaval all over Europe. Outbreaks like those in Italy and Spain do nothing to cure the conditions which cause

them. They are only symptoms of coming bankruptcy and ruin. The nation and the army rest on the peasant's back; if that be broken, all must fall.

If we turn to Austria, we shall find an additional element of disintegration—race injustice. Only a generation ago, the Magyars won their rights; it is melancholy to see that they are to-day as bitterly opposed to a recognition of the equality of the Slavs as are the Germans. Bohemia was robbed of her independent kingship by means as base as any history tells of; and only Spain under the Inquisition offers a parallel to the religious persecution of the Czechs by the Hapsburgs. And while feeling the utmost sympathy for the heavy sorrows that recent years have brought to the House of Austria, we cannot but remember that there is a Nemesis in history; and that this famous House has not been armed with justice and tolerance, mercy and gentle charity; it has too often been a scourge to mankind, and its subject provinces again and again preferred the scimitars of the Moslems to the tender mercies of the House of Hapsburg.

So that in Austria, also, the causes that engender anarchy are steadily at work. And should any temporary cause lower the margin of subsistence below the starvation limit, we may confidently look for uprisings throughout the Dual Monarchy as pitiable as those of Italy and Spain; with this difference, that Austria can always count on sending to any province troops which are practically of a hostile race.

In Russia, the means of subsistence have fallen below the limit, in nineteen provinces; yet there is no anarchy, no insurrection. We must except Russia, in respect of everything we have said of anarchy. For there the spiritual conditions are different; and, therefore, like causes produce unlike effects. The Russian has not that sense of individualism which leads to protest. His theory of life is different. A large part of his interest lies in the other world. This is too large a theme to more than touch on; for one proof of it, we have the admitted fact that the peasantry of Russia took no part in Nihilism, a movement which was rather academic than popular. From the modern life of Europe, the Russian peasantry stands apart.

When we come to consider the causes of anarchy in France and Germany, we must introduce an entirely new element in addition to those already enumerated in considering the situation existing

in the other countries referred to. And this addition suggests reflections of the utmost gravity.

It would not be wrong to say that the causes we have hitherto spoken of are a heritage from the Middle Ages; and that, with the passing of the mediæval world, they, too, will gradually pass away. Ecclesiastical tyranny, which exercised such a blighting influence over Spain, has received a death-blow. Two generations have passed since the monasteries throughout the Peninsula were suppressed. They are not likely to be reinstated. And so with the levies of territorial nobilities; the conditions of the modern world are making their continuance an impossibility. The great land-owners are condemned to see their domains lie fallow; and, with every new territory brought under cultivation in younger lands, this principle will bear more heavily on the territorial nobility of Europe.

We may also hope to see excessive taxation gradually corrected, and one burden lightened by the extinction of national debts through the establishment of sinking funds. And, if the Tzar's splendid dream be carried out, we may hope to see some lightening of the burden of the army, already so fatal to Italy.

Can we, then, look forward confidently to a time when, through the fading of mediævalism, anarchy, and the causes which produce it, will become things of the past?

When we turn from Spain, Italy and Austria to Germany and France, we find an answer; and it is unfortunately in a negative sense. Modern conditions remove the old evils, only to bring evils of their own. The first cause of anarchy, lying behind the secondary causes we have examined, has been carried forward into our modern life, and is as active as ever. That first cause is injustice.

The burden of ecclesiastical tyranny was based on injustice—a levy on the producer, with no material return. And to perpetuate this injustice, and the intellectual condition which alone would submit to it, the basest means were used; persecution defended those formulas of theology which were the title-deeds of the church.

The principle of rent, the life-spring of territorial nobilities, was also based on injustice—the knight with the sword, as against the peasant with the spade. The low-browed peasantry of Europe bear witness to the moral degradation which accompanied and made possible this injustice.

Excessive taxation, especially for the maintenance of armies, was not less unjust. The peasants gave their goods and lives to settle quarrels they had no part in, the disputes of the great successful families as to who had the right to practise extortion on the peasants of other lands.

This principle of injustice has come forth anew in the modern world. It is everywhere present in the relations between capital and labor, between the artisan and the manufacturer. And in this form, it is the new element of anarchy in Germany and France. I do not pretend to settle a question of ideal justice, or to decide what share should go to labor, and what to capital, of what they jointly produce. It will be enough to show the principle on which division is now made. The manufacturer and the capitalist reduce the share of labor to the lowest limit; they take advantage of the law of competition to wring from the laborer the largest quantity of work for the lowest wage. In other words, in bargaining with the laborer, they work on him through his fear of starvation. Under the influence of competition, the workman must give his toil for what will just keep him alive; otherwise, there are poorer than he to take his place. And the manufacturer and the capitalist take advantage of this bitter law of want, in all their bargains with their employees. The result is that while the employer of labor grows daily richer, the laborer can never rise above the starvation limit; nor can he see the slightest hope for his children.

If the factory makes no profit, he loses his work and livelihood; but if it makes a profit, he has no compensating gain. Every particle of that profit, beyond the mere living wage settled by competition, goes into other hands; and there is not the faintest prospect, under existing conditions, that this will be altered for the better. So that, under existing conditions, the laboring class is doomed to toil for a mere subsistence, in perpetuity; doomed, at the same time, to see another class grow rich through that ill-paid toil. That is the cause of modern anarchy, of anarchy in countries like Germany and France, which are passing out from those shadows of mediævalism that still hang over Austria, Italy and Spain.

And this leads us to a consideration as gloomy as it is possible to imagine, and which we have not yet seen suggested, though it is sufficiently obvious. Labor has been trying conclusions with

capital in England, and labor has been defeated. In 1898, after twenty weeks of struggle, of suffering and privation, the colliers of South Wales went back to work, practically on the masters' terms. The total loss was estimated at six millions sterling; the men's share in that loss at about half that sum. They sacrificed about the same sum in the engineers' strike; so that these two contests cost the labor of England twenty-five million dollars. And that with defeat!

In the struggle from mediæval to modern conditions in politics, it is the glory of England to have discovered and applied constitutional means. England is now attempting constitutional means in the struggle between labor and capital. And, so far, England has failed. And we have cause to fear that, as the whole world has been influenced by England's constitutional success in politics, so the whole world will be influenced, in a contrary sense, by England's constitutional failure in economics. The alternative is anarchy; a war longer and fiercer than any the world has seen, fought in the dark, with weapons forged by modern chemistry and electricity.

Behind the secondary causes of anarchy, as ever, lies the primary cause: the failure of justice between man and man; the willingness to take advantage of another's necessity for our own profit. There is no cure but true and generous dealing, giving to others the measure we desire for ourselves.

CHARLES JOHNSTON.